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Lao People's Democratic Republic*, **

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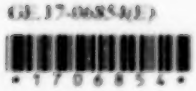

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I. General information of the Lao People's Democratic Republic

A. Geographic, economic, social and cultural characteristics of the State

Geography and History

1. ***Geography***: The Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) is a landlocked country, occupying an area of 236,800 km2. Most of the country is covered by mountain and forests. It is situated in Southeast Asia, sharing borders with the People's Republic of China in the North, the Kingdom of Cambodia in the South, the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam in the East, the Kingdom of Thailand in the West and the Republic of the Union of Myanmar in the north-west. The Mekong River forms a large part of the western boundary with Thailand and forms a shorter boundary with Myanmar. The Mekong and its tributaries provide an important transportation network.

2. ***History***: Laos is an ancient nation in the region and the world. The Lao people have lived and gone through stages of existence, evolution and development on this beloved land for a long time. In the middle of the 14th century, King Fa Ngum united Lao townships and founded the Lane Xang Kingdom, which in the subsequent times was built into a prosperous nation though the country was invaded by foreign aggressors at different times in history. Laos was a vassal territory and colony of foreign powers for almost a century and a half. In the 20th century, particularly after the World War II, the Lao People's Revolutionary Party led the multi-ethnic Lao people in a heroic revolutionary struggle for the liberty of the country. After a long struggle with full of hardships and sacrifices, the Lao people gained national independence and established the Lao People's Democratic Republic, which is an independent and sovereign State on 2nd December 1975. The Lao people have become the masters of the country.

Population

3. ***Population size and gender structure***: according to the most recent Population and Housing Census (PHC) conducted in 2015, a total population of the Lao PDR was 6,492,228, of whom 3,237,458 were females and 3,254,770 were males. The population has nearly doubled from 3,584,803 in 1985, when the first census was carried out. About one million people have been added to the country's population every decade. At its current population, the country remains one of the smallest in Southeast Asia. Although the population has grown during the last three decades, the annual population growth rate reduced from 2.08 per cent (1995-2005) to 1.45 per cent (2005-2015) (see Table 1).

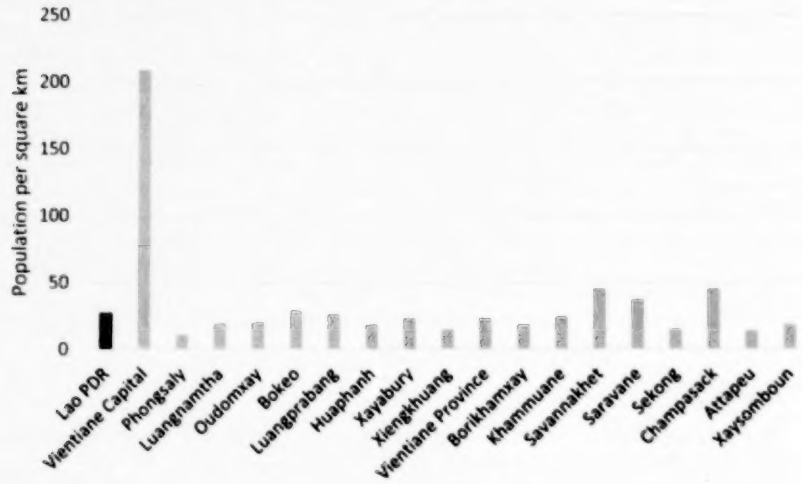
Table 1
Enumerated population and intercensal annual growth rate of Lao PDR

Census year	*Enumerated population*	*Average annual growth rate between PHCs (%)*
1985	3 584 803	
		2.47
1995	4 574 848	
		2.08
2005	5 621 982	
		1.45
2015	6 492 228	

Source: 2015 PHC.

4. ***Population density and urban/rural distribution***: Population density of the country as a whole was 27 persons per square kilometre. A total of 33 per cent of the overall population lived in urban areas, while 67 per cent lived in rural areas, of which 59 per cent lived in rural areas with road access and 8 per cent without road access. The densest part of the country is Vientiane Capital where population density was 209 persons per square kilometre, nearly eight-times higher than the national figure. This finding was expected as Vientiane Capital is the most urbanised area in the country. Outside Vientiane Capital, there was little variation in population density. The provinces of Champasack and Savannakhet have the second highest population density at 45 people per square kilometre. Mountainous provinces are expected to have low population density. This is the case in Phongsaly which had 11 persons per square kilometre — the lowest in the country. Other provinces with low population density include Attapeu, Sekong and Xiengkhuang (see Figure 1).

Figure 1
Population density by Province, 2015



Source: 2015 PHC

5. ***Birth and death rates***: Fertility rate for the one-year period prior to the 2015 PHC among all women aged 15 to 49 years was 3.2 per 1,000 women. An estimated total number of births in Lao PDR was 183,000 or an estimated crude birth rate of 28 births per 1,000 population, a drop of 7 per 1,000 population from the 2005 PHC figure of 35 per 1,000 population. The crude death rate stood at eight deaths per 1,000 population.

6. ***Ethnicity***: Lao PDR is an ethnically diverse country. The population of the Lao PDR consists of 49 ethnic groups living scattered throughout the country, and is classified into 4 ethno-linguistic groups, namely Lao-Tai (66.7 per cent), Mon-Khmer (20.6 per cent), Hmong-Imien (8.4 per cent) and Sino-Tibetan (3.3 per cent). Slightly over half of the nation's population (53 per cent) belong to the Lao ethnic group. Khmou and Hmong are the second and third largest groups, respectively. Each of these two groups comprises more than half a million individuals (see Table 2).

Table 2
Population by Ethnic Group

	Population	*% to total population*
Lao	3 427 665	53.2
Khmou	708 412	11.0
Hmong	595 028	9.2
Phouthay	218 108	3.4

	Population	*% to total population*
Tai	201 576	3.1
Makong	163 285	2.5
Katang	144 255	2.2
Lue	126 229	2.0
Akha	112 979	1.8
Others	749 153	11.6

Source: 2015 PHC.

7. ***Citizenship***: According to the PHC 2015, a number of 6,446,690, or nearly 99 per cent of the population residing in the country was a Lao citizen. The remainder of residents were citizens of other countries which amounted to 45,000, mainly Vietnamese (19,000), Chinese (13,400), Cambodian and Thai (about 3,000 each). The other resident foreigners, of which more than 1,000 come from other Asian countries (see Table 3).

Table 3
Population, distribution by citizenship

	Population figures			
Nationality	*Female*	*Male*	*Total*	*Per cent*
Laotian	3 221 255	3 225 435	6 446 690	99.2
Cambodian	1 608	1 820	3 428	0.05
Chinese	3 845	9 555	13 400	0.2
Myanmar	1 305	1 530	2 835	0.04
Thai	656	2 637	3 293	0.05
Vietnamese	7 576	11 362	18 938	0.3
Other Asian citizens	330	946	1 276	0.01
European	336	628	964	0.0
African	40	70	110	0.0
American	245	346	591	0.0
Australian	61	144	205	0.0
Other citizens	45	78	123	0.0
Not stated	156	219	375	0
Total	**3 237 458**	**3 254 770**	**6 492 228**	**100**

Source: 2015 PHC.

8. ***Religion***: The majority of the population is Buddhist. There are some 4 million (64.7 per cent) Buddhism followers, and Christianity has 1.7 per cent of followers. Islam and Baha'i have 1 per cent of followers and the remaining 33 per cent are Animists and others (see Table 4).

Table 4
Total population by religion

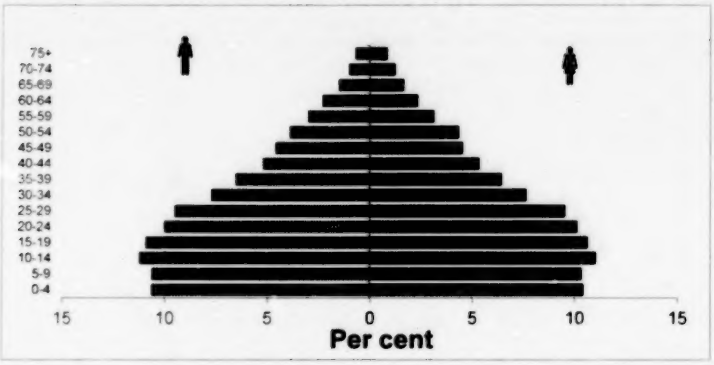
	Population			*Percentage*		
Religion	*Total*	*Female*	*Male*	*Total*	*Female*	*Male*
Buddhist	4 201 993	2 104 718	2 097 275	64.7	65.0	64.4
Christian	112 230	56 403	55 827	1.7	1.7	1.7
Bahai	2 122	943	1 179	-	-	-
Islam	1 605	749	856	-	-	-

	Population			Percentage		
Religion	*Total*	*Female*	*Male*	*Total*	*Female*	*Male*
Other	19 901	8 279	11 622	0.3	0.3	0.4
No religion	2 040 365	1 009 893	1 030 472	31.4	31.2	31.7
Not stated	114 012	56 473	57 539	1.8	1.7	1.8
Total	**6 492 228**	**3 237 458**	**3 254 770**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Source: 2015 PHC.

9. ***Age structure***: Lao PDR has a youthful population that is most likely in the process of ageing as shown in the age pyramids in Figure 2. Half of the population in 2015 was below 23.5 years old, while the corresponding age in 2005 was 18.5 years - an increase in median age by five years. The proportion of children aged less than 15 years had declined significantly from 39 to 32 per cent, while the proportion of the elderly population increased, albeit slightly. The age group 15-64 years experienced a gain in its share of the population from 57 per cent in 2005 to 64 per cent in 2015 (see Table 5).

Figure 2
Age pyramids of the population, 2015



Source: 2015 PHC.

Table 5
Indicators of age structure, 2005-2015

Proportion in age group	*2005*	*2015*
0-14	39.4	32
15-64	56.7	63.7
65 and over	3.9	4.2
10-24	34.3	31.9
Median age	18.5	23.5
Economic dependency ratio		
Young-age dependency ratio	70	50
Old-age dependency ratio	7	7
Total dependency ratio	**77**	**57**

Source: 2015 PHC.

10. Dependency ratio: In 2015, the young dependency ratio was 50, down from 70 in 2005. This means every 100 working age people must provide for the needs of 50 children aged less than 15 years. The reduction in dependency ratio mirrors the prospect of reaping the demographic dividend. This means savings resulting from the reduced burden will pave

the way for more investment in economic development. The old-age dependency ratio remained unchanged, seven elderly dependents for every 100 working population. These ratios are only rough indicators of economic burden, as not all working-age people actually work, while some dependents are actually in the work force (see Table 6 above).

11. Life expectancy has increased from 52 to 65 years for female and 59 to 62 years for male between 2005 and 2015.

12. ***Household size***: The total number of households in Lao PDR was 1,198,272 in 2015, which increased 24 per cent compared to the 2005 PHC, of which 1,183,386 were private households and 14,886 institutional households. The population living in these households, however, increased by only 14 per cent suggesting that the number of inhabitants per household had reduced in 2005. Lao households had 5.8 members on average, but in 2015 this number had dropped to 5.3 (see Table 6).

Table 6
Population in private households, number and average size of private households by urban-rural

	Population in private households			*Number of private households*			*Average size of household*	
	2015	*2005*	*% Increase*	*2015*	*2005*	*% Increase*	*2015*	*2005*
Lao PDR	6 277 592	5 499 247	14.2	1 183 386	952 386	24.3	5.3	5.8
Urban	2 003 046	1 436 361	39.5	408 610	265 206	54.1	4.9	5.4
Rural with roads	3 767 323	2 862 167	31.6	687 492	490 272	40.2	5.5	5.8
Rural without roads	507 223	1 194 222	-57.5	87 284	195 413	-55.3	5.8	6.1

Source: 2015 PHC.

13. Households headed by women: In a patriarchal society like Lao PDR, the head of a household was usually a male member and this was borne out by 2015 PHC data that showed an overwhelming majority (87 per cent) of all households were headed by a male (see Table 7). There was a greater chance that a woman headed a household if she lived in an urban area, where 18 per cent of households were headed by females, compared to 11 per cent in rural areas with roads and 7 per cent in rural areas without roads.

Table 7
Distribution of number of households by sex of the head of household by urban-rural

	Number of households	*Sex of the household head*		
		Total	*Female*	*Male*
Urban-rural				
Urban	408 610	100	17.8	82.2
Rural with roads	687 492	100	11.2	88.8
Rural without roads	87 284	100	7.4	92.6
Total	**1 183 386**	**100**	**13.2**	**86.8**

Source: 2015 PHC

Economy

14. The country is listed as one of the least developed countries (LDC) in the world with a per capita gross national income (GNI) of US$ 1,232 in 2015, an increase from US$ 491 in 2005.

15. During the period of 2011-2015, despite the impact of the world economic and financial crisis, the economy of the Lao PDR experienced an average gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate of 7.9 per cent, compared to 6.24 per cent as of 2001-2005. GDP per capita increased from US$ 1.217 in the fiscal year (FY) 2010-2011 to US$ 1.970 by the FY 2014-2015.

16. The structure of the economy has been changing in recent years. The share of agricultural sector which used to cover the most part of GDP has decreased from 51.9 per cent in 2000 to 23.7 per cent in 2015. The industrial share increased from 22.4 per cent to 29.1 per cent and the service output share increased from 25.7 per cent to 47.2 per cent in the same period.

17. During the 7th NSEDP implementation period (2010-2015), the government has allocated budget to invest in disaster management at provincial level, economic development and poverty reduction. This policy has resulted in a gradual increase in public investment from 1,753.23 billion kip, covering 6.13 per cent of the total investment in FY2010-2011 to 3,424.93 billion kip, covering 7.72 per cent of the total investment in FY2014-2015. In this connection, the sectors and provinces allocated their budget in moderately high amount in the projects that seen effective and in line with the government's priorities as follows:

- Economic area covered 30 per cent of the total investment;
- Social area covered 35 per cent; while Education sector and Health sector covered 17 per cent and 9 per cent of the total investment respectively; and
- Road and office building construction covered 35 per cent; while road construction covered 28 per cent and office building covered 7 per cent of the total investment.

18. For some years, the government has organized the Round Table Meeting with Development Partners for consultation and fund raising for implementing the 7th NSEDP. During the five-year period (2011-2015), Lao PDR received a total ODA of 26,981.26 billion kip or about USD 3,369 million, equivalent to 91.05 per cent of the plan target (30,000-33,000). The use of grants and loans (ODA) has been focused mainly on socio-cultural and economic sectors, particularly the grants have been allocated for the development of social and cultural sectors to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDG); and the loans focused on the development of economic sector and infrastructure such as energy-mining, agriculture and forestry, public work and transportation.

Standard of living

19. In 2014, there were 76,604 poor families, 1,736 poor villages amounted to 23.09 per cent of the total villages nationwide (according to the poverty assessment in 2014). The poverty ratio reduced from 27.6 per cent in 2007-2008 to 23.2 per cent in 2012-2013 and it is estimated to reduce to 20 per cent in 2015 (according to the Fifth Lao Expenditure and Consumption Survey (LECS 5). According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report in 2015, the Lao PDR ranked 141 of 188 countries and territories in terms of economic development. Strong economic growth has allowed it to move up to the World Bank's classification of low-income economy to "lower middle-income".

20. Lao PDR aims to become eligible for graduation from Least Developed Country (LDC) status by the 2020. In order to develop the economy, the Lao Government developed a series of National Socio-Economic Development Plans (NSEDP). The most recent 8th five-year NSEDP (2016-2020) aims at graduating from the LDC status. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were incorporated into these national priorities and goals.

21. Lao government has attached poverty reduction as a priority in the 7th NSEDP to achieve MDGs in 2015, and to graduate country from the LDC status by 2020. The number of poor families in Lao PDR decreased from 28.7 per cent in 2005 to 8.11 per cent in 2014,[1] exceeding the MDG1 which was set at 24 per cent. This decrease is due to the combination between public investment to expand the transport network and to the promotion of commercialized agriculture production implemented by the private sector, by citizens as well as domestic and international civil society organizations. In June 2015, the Food and Agriculture Organization to the United Nations (FAO) declared that Lao PDR had attained MDG1 related to the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger.

22. Lao PDR met the MDG target of halving its national poverty rate. The proportion of people living below the national poverty line has decreased over the years from 46 per cent in 1992 to 23 per cent in 2012. Successful poverty reduction efforts were linked to many factors, including road and infrastructure construction in rural areas.

23. The economic development levels in different regions and localities are not the same and disparities exist among the regions and localities. The Gini coefficient has risen by 3.8 per cent. While there is a nationwide reduction in poverty, the northern region still lags behind other regions.

24. Enhanced national security and development in the Lao PDR has yielded significant dividends over the past three decades. This has secured peace and stability for the country. Socio-economic development has recorded continual progress reflected in the gradual growth of the national economy, the proper management of finances, the stabilized national currency (Kip), the decline in poverty and progressive path towards achieving the MDGs.

Social and cultural fields

Education

25. Education is a top priority in the policies of the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic. Translating this priority into practice is among the endeavours of the Government, making education crucial to the development of all other sectors. The Constitution and Law on Education provide that education is both a right and a duty of an individual and the community collectively.

26. The Law on Education provides for compulsory primary education. Education has the aim of making every Lao a good citizen full of morals, knowledge and capabilities. The State and society attend to developing a high quality national education system, to create opportunities and conditions for all people to access to education in the country, especially those living in the remote and rural areas, ethnic groups, women, children and disadvantaged persons. The State promotes and encourages the private sectors to invest in national education, and allows private schools to operate in conformity with the standards set by the State in curriculum development. The State in cooperation with the people themselves builds schools in order to comprehensively systematize the national education to reach the areas inhabited by ethnic groups. Also, the donor community and friendly countries have provided invaluable assistance for the education development of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, especially in building primary schools for children in many parts of the country.

27. Education development is part and parcel of the National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy (NGPES) and is aimed at improving access to education, reducing women's illiteracy, especially ethnic women's, through allocating budget to increase public expenditure on education which covers 17 per cent of the total government expenditures to improve and develop education infrastructure and improve teaching-learning. The Government is in the process of implementing the Education Strategy by 2020 and Education for All Programmes. The national education system includes formal and non-formal education. The formal education system consists of five levels: pre-school

[1] Decision of Prime Minister No. 106/PM, dated 30 September, on Adoption and Promulgation of Application of Monitoring and Assessment of Poverty and Devolvement.

education, primary education, secondary education, vocational education and higher (tertiary) education.

28. In general, education has been developing positively in both quality and quantity. Today, primary schools have been built and repaired in the remote areas and 94 per cent of all villages throughout the country. The net enrolment rate in 2015 was 98.5 per cent in primary schools, 78.1 per cent in lower secondary schools and 36.8 per cent in upper secondary schools. The net intake ratio in primary education was 97.2 per cent. The repetition rate in primary education was 5.8 per cent and the dropout rate in primary education was 5.2 per cent. The survival rate in primary education in 2015 was 78.3 per cent, a significant increase from 67.7 per cent in 2011. The dropout rate was 7.2 per cent in lower secondary education and 4.9 per cent in upper secondary education.

Health

29. The Government has initiated a Strategic Plan in the Public Health Sector for the period 2000-2020 as part of the NGPES. This specific strategy (vision) sets the overall objectives and programmes to meet the needs in healthcare for the multi-ethnic people of the Lao People's Democratic Republic. The overall objectives of the public health sector are the following:

- Universal, just and equal healthcare all over the country irrespective of gender, age, social status, customs, religion, ethnicity and residence;
- Basic healthcare must meet the needs and expectations of the people;
- Improve the health situation of the people, in particular the poor.

30. In the NGPES, the Government set priorities and strategies to eliminate poverty through improving healthcare focusing on the country's 47 poorest districts. These priorities and strategies are as follows:

- Increase access to healthcare service;
- Increase the use of clean water and toilets;
- Decrease child mortality rate;
- Promote the production and use of traditional medicines;
- Achieve 100 per cent basic healthcare service in 72 poor districts by 2010.

31. The Government set 12 strategic programmes to reduce poverty in relation to healthcare: (1) health education and information; (2) basic healthcare service network; (3) capacity building: training of medical personnel with a focus on producing ethnic medical personnel, gender promotion and provision of qualified medical personnel to localities; (4) promotion of the health of mothers and children; (5) vaccination for women and children; (6) provision of clean water and healthy environment; (7) control of communicable diseases; (8) control of the spread of HIV/AIDS; (9) creation of revolving medical kits funds; (10) control of food and pharmaceutical products to ensure safety for consumers; (11) promotion of the use of traditional medicines together with modern medicines; (12) strengthening the sustainability of the public health sector.

32. The Government intends to expand the public health network from the central to local levels with a special focus on the grass roots level. Villages and cluster villages are the main targets for public health services. At the same time, private healthcare services are encouraged and have expanded. National pharmaceutical products meet 48 per cent of the national needs.

33. The implementation of the programmes in the public health sector has seen progress and results. According to the 8th Five-Year National Socio-Economic Development Plan (8th NSEDP), throughout the country there are 985 healthcare centres, 859 of which can provide services on birth delivery. At local level, there are 135 district hospitals, 19 of which can provide surgery services, and 17 provincial hospitals that can provide basic treatment, regular to emergency surgery and cesarean birth surgery. At the central level, there are 5 hospitals and 3 specific healthcare centers. There are 13 private hospitals or

healthcare centers that officially operate in the country (8 in Vientiane Capital and 5 in provinces). The Ministry of Health give permission to 1,054 private clinics to officially provide health services (360 in Vientiane Capital and 694 in provinces).

34. According to the 2015 PHC, around 61 per cent of households used drinking water from an improved source. Only 7 per cent had access to piped water, which suggested infrastructure for distribution of water through a community water system was still undesirably limited. As a consequence, a large proportion of households (36 per cent) bought and consumed bottled water available commercially. Nearly a fifth of households got water from protected wells, while an insignificant proportion collected rain water.

35. The proportion of households that have access to an improved sanitation facility was remarkable high. Three-in-four households used a toilet facility considered sanitary. Among urban households, this proportion was as high as 94 per cent. Even in rural areas, access to improved sanitation facility was restively high — 65 per cent in rural areas with roads and 41 per cent in rural areas without roads.

36. The maternal and child mortality rates have improved. The infant mortality rate decreased from 70 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2005 to 57 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2015. The under-5 mortality death also dropped from 98 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2005 to 86 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2015. The maternal mortality ratio also declined from 405 maternal deaths per 1000,000 live births in 2005 to 206 maternal deaths per 100,000 live birth in 2015.

37. HIV/AIDS prevalence in general population remains low and thus the target is achievable. In 2012, the prevalence rate was 0.28 per cent compared to the 2015 target of below 1 per cent of total population; HIV prevalence among high risk group aged 15-24 reduced to 1.2 per cent against the target of 5 per cent. HIV prevalence among sex-workers aged 15-49 reduced to 2.44 per cent compared to the target of below 5 per cent.

38. Heterosexual contact fuels much of the epidemic in Lao PDR. The patterns of groups engaging in high-risk behaviour influence the geographic spread of HIV. Such groups include men who migrate for work without families and returning migrant workers, especially females. The groups at highest risk are sex workers, especially those not working in entertainment establishments as clients think that they are safer when having sex with them.

39. Death associated with malaria reduced from 7.1 in 2000 to 0.29 per 100,000 population in 2011, reached the 2015 target which was below 0.2 per 100,000 population. The strategy on malaria control has been quite effective leading to the widespread use of bed nets amongst adults and children. The National Bed Net Survey found that 81 per cent of children under five years of age slept under insecticide-treated bed nets and that 98 per cent of children slept under one kind of bed net or another.

40. Proportion of new tuberculosis cases detected under Directly Observed Treatment Short Courses (DOTS) was 72 per cent exceeding the 2015 plan target of 70 per cent by 2 per cent. Proportion of tuberculosis cases cured under DOTS is 91 per cent exceeding the 2015 target by 6 per cent. Tuberculosis infection rate was at the level of 151/100,000 population in 2009. In light of the 2015 target of 240/100,000 population, it is possible to achieve the target on combating tuberculosis.

41. Ten major causes of death in hospitals in 2006 throughout the country were pneumonia (25.1 per cent), stroke (8.8 per cent), head injury (7.2 per cent), malaria (5.3 per cent), old age (3.2 per cent), injury or accident (2.0 per cent), meningitis (1.6 per cent), road or traffic accident (1.5 per cent), diarrhoea (1.2 per cent), pernicious malaria or cerebral malaria (1.1 per cent) and others (42.9 per cent).

Labour force and job creation

42. The policy of liberalization of investment has brought an increase in the creation of new jobs. According to the 2015 PHC, the labour force in the Lao PDR was 3,547,852 persons, while the proportion of unemployment was 73,270 persons, amounted to 2.1 per cent. The composition of the workforce has also changed in the direction of the structure of the economy. The workforce in the agricultural sector declined from 71.3 per cent in 2010

to 65.3 per cent in 2015, while the workforce in industry increased from 8.3 per cent in 2010 to 11.4 per cent in 2015. The workforce in the service sector increased from 20.4 per cent to 23.3 per cent in the same period.

43. In the fiscal year 2014-2015, there were 165 vocational centers and labour skills development institutions in, ten of which run by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, 52 run by other ministries, 13 of which owned by mass organizations and the remaining 90 run by the private sector. There were 248,765 people have recently received vocational and skills development training.

Culture

44. The Lao Government's policy on culture is aimed at promoting Lao national culture and building a spiritually civilized Lao society. The Government pays attention to protecting the national culture and preserving and promoting the fine cultures and traditions of all ethnic groups.

45. The Government has been trying to expand cultural activities to the grass roots level through the building of model cultural villages, among other things. In addition to the preservation of cultural sites and national heritage, the multi-ethnic people of the Lao People's Democratic Republic actively participate in the building of model cultural villages. At the present time, more than 150,000 households have been awarded the status of "cultural households"; more than 580 villages and cluster villages have been awarded the status of cultural villages; and 35 children's cultural centres have been set up in the country.

46. The Government has expanded the media to localities. Radio and television now cover most parts of the country. Central radio and television and some local stations are broadcast in Lao and some other ethnic dialects.

B. Constitution, political and judicial structures

47. Following independence in 1975 the first Congress of the People's Deputies proclaimed the end of the monarchy and established the Lao People's Democratic Republic with the President as the Head of State, Prime Minister as the Head of Government, and the People's Supreme Council as the representative organ of the rights and interests of the multi-ethnic Lao people. Local councils were established to represent the people in their localities.

48. In 1991, the People's Supreme Council adopted the first Constitution, transforming the country from being governed by instructions to being governed by the Constitution and laws. Based on the principles in the Constitution reflecting the people's will and aspirations, the Lao Government has pursued a policy of building a rule-of-law state. Laws and sub-laws have been adopted since to regulate activities and social relationships in different fields. The Constitution was amended twice in 2003 and 2015 in order to meet the needs of the new era of national development.

49. Under the 2015 Constitution, the Lao PDR is an independent and sovereign State which has territorial integrity. It is an indivisible country belonging to all ethnic groups comprising the Lao people as a whole. Lao PDR is a state of people's democracy. All powers belong to the people, and are by the people and for the interests of the Lao multi-ethnic people. The right of the Lao multi-ethnic people as the masters of the country is exercised and ensured through the functioning of the political system with the Lao People's Revolutionary Party as its leading nucleus. The National Assembly (the legislature created under the Constitution replacing the then People's Supreme Council) and other State organs are established and function on the principle of democratic centralism. The State protects the inalienable freedoms and democratic rights of the people.

50. The National Assembly is the representative of the rights and interests of the multi-ethnic Lao people. It is the highest organ of State power as well as the legislative body that adopts the Constitution, laws, makes decisions on national fundamental issues, oversees the acts and performances of the executive organs, the people's courts and the people's prosecutors and ratifies treaties. Under the Constitution, the organisations and persons that

have the right to propose draft laws (bills) are as follows: President of the State, National Assembly Standing Committee; the Government; People's Supreme Court; Office of the Supreme People's Prosecutor; Lao Front for National Construction and mass organisations at the central level. To date, the National Assembly has passed about 90 laws relating to public administration, judicial, economic, social, cultural and labour matters.

51. The election of deputies to the National Assembly is carried out on the basis of universal, equal, direct suffrage and secret ballots. Voters have the right to propose the dismissal of their representatives if they are found to have behaved in a way unbefitting their honourable positions and to have lost the people's confidence. The election of the current legislature of the National Assembly took place in 2006 with a turnout of 99 per cent. The term of office of each legislature of the National Assembly is 5 years.

52. Female deputies have gradually increased in number. The first legislature consisted of 45 members including 4 females; the second legislature — 79 members, 5 females; the third — 85 members, 8 females; the fourth — 99 members, 21 females; and the fifth — 109 members and 25 females. The present 6th legislature of the National Assembly has 29 female deputies amounting to 27 per cent of the total 115 members of the National Assembly. In addition, a female deputies' caucus has been set up within the National Assembly to enhance gender mainstreaming in this highest State organ. It is expected that the proportion of female deputies in the 7th legislature of the National Assembly will increase to 30 per cent.

53. The administrative system of the Lao PDR consists of 17 provinces and Vientiane Capital City. The Capital City and each province are divided into districts with 148 districts in the country. Each district is divided into villages with 8507 villages at the present time. The national administration has four levels: the State, province/Capital City, district and village. At the State level, the president and prime minister are the head of State and the head of government respectively. Provinces are governed by provincial governors, while Vientiane Capital City is governed by a mayor. Districts are governed by district chiefs and villages are administered by village heads. Provincial governors are nominated by the president, districts chiefs are nominated by the prime minister upon the recommendation of the respective provincial governor whereas village heads are directly elected by villagers. Vientiane Capital, provinces and districts have vertical and horizontal administrative structures comprising departments and offices. Provincial and district vertical departments and offices are technically under the respective central ministry and agency while they are administratively under the provincial governors and district chiefs respectively.

54. The President is the Head of State of the Lao PDR representing the multi-ethnic Lao people both within the country and abroad. The President is elected by the National Assembly for a five-year term. The President has the power to make proposals to the National Assembly for approval of the appointment or removal of high-ranking State officials, namely the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Ministers and Ministers. The Vice-President is assigned to perform the duties on behalf of the President during his absence and at the same time is in charge of other specific duties in accordance with the Constitution and laws. The President has the power to promulgate the laws adopted by the National Assembly, to issue presidential decrees and ordinances, and to promulgate the ratification of treaties.

55. The Government is the executive branch of the State. The Government implements the Constitution, laws and sub-laws, and administers the State's policies in all fields such as political, economic, cultural, social, national defence and security, and foreign affairs. The Government has the power to sign and guide the implementation of treaties and agreements. The Prime Minister is the Head of Government. The Government consists of ministers and chairmen of the ministry-equivalent organizations. The Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Ministers and Ministers are elected by the National Assembly for a five-year term of office. The Government holds regular monthly meetings and may convene extraordinary meetings when needed. Government meetings are chaired by the Prime Minister. The President may chair a government meeting on special occasions or if necessary. The Government is accountable to the President and the National Assembly. The Prime Minister reports on the performances of the Government to the National Assembly. Members of the National Assembly have the right to question the Prime Minister or other

Members of the Government on important issues of the country relating to the activities of the executive organs.

56. The people's courts constitute the judicial branch of the State, consisting of the People's Supreme Court; regional people's courts; provincial people's courts, zonal people's courts and the military court. In the event that it is deemed necessary, the National Assembly Standing Committee may decide to establish a special court. The People's Supreme Court in the capacity of the State adjudicative organ administers the people's courts at all levels and examines their verdicts.

57. The system of people's prosecutors consists of the Supreme People's Prosecutor, regional people's prosecutors; provincial people's prosecutors, zonal people's prosecutors and the military prosecutor. The Office of the People's Prosecutor is a State body that has the right to monitor the correct and uniform implementation of laws and regulations by all ministries, ministry-equivalent organisations, organisations attached to the Government, the Lao Front for National Construction, mass organisations, social organisations, local administrations, enterprises, civil servants and citizens. The Office of the People's Prosecutor also exercises the right of public prosecution.

58. Village mediation units have been established for settling disputes among villagers thus reducing the number of cases in the courts. A village mediation unit comprises the village chief, a village security member, each member from the Village Front, Youth Union, Women's Union. The village mediation system functions as the informal justice sector to settle minor disputes.

59. The Lao People's Democratic Republic is the country with a mixed system of civil and socialist legal traditions with a predominance of civil law. In 1993, the Government issued a Decree on the Hierarchy of Legal Acts of Lao PDR to serve as a reference for the State, mass and social organizations in proposing draft laws/legal acts within their fields. In 2003, the President issued a Presidential Ordinance on the Making of Legal Instruments, which sets out the hierarchy of legal instruments and official documents in Lao PDR as follows:

(a) The Constitution;

(b) Laws passed by the National Assembly;

(c) Resolutions of the National Assembly;

(d) Resolutions and Recommendations of the Standing Committee of the National Assembly;

(e) Presidential Ordinances and Decrees;

(f) Resolutions and Decrees of the Government;

(g) Decrees, Decisions, Orders and Recommendations of the Prime Minister;

(h) Decisions, Orders, Instructions and Notifications of Ministers, Chairmen of Ministry-equivalent Organizations, Heads of the Organizations attached to the Government, the President of People's Supreme Court, Supreme People's Prosecutor, Provincial Governors, Capital City Mayor, Permanent Secretaries, Directors-General, District Chiefs and Municipality Mayors;

(i) Village regulations.

60. In 2009, the President issued a Presidential Ordinance on the Making, Participation in and Implementation of International Treaties in the Lao People's Democratic Republic. The Ordinance sets forth the rules and procedures for negotiations on treaties, signing, ratifying, accession, implementation, monitoring and reporting of treaties. The Ordinance has clearly defined the status of treaties in the Lao legal system. Especially, the Ordinance provides that: (a) the enactment of the law, sub-laws, regulations shall not prejudice the obligations of the Lao PDR under treaties to which it is a party; (b) treaty the provisions of which are not consistent with laws adopted by NA or not yet reflected in laws shall be transformed into domestic law to become nationally effective; (c) in case of conflict between domestic law and treaty, the latter prevails, but such treaty prevalence over

domestic law must be consistent with the national Constitution and reservations made by Lao PDR; (d) treaties that are already consistent with the Constitution of the Lao PDR and laws may be directly applicable. Today, the Lao PDR is a party to hundreds of international legal instruments, including multilateral, regional and bilateral treaties and agreements. Over the past years, the Lao PDR has put efforts into transforming treaty obligations into national legislation with progress achieved in many aspects. The adoption of the Presidential Ordinance enables the Lao PDR to more effectively and successfully implement its international legal obligations.

II. General framework for the promotion and protection of human rights

A. Acceptance of international human rights norms

61. Of the core United Nations human rights treaties, the Lao People's Democratic Republic is a party to seven conventions and two protocols: the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; and the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. The two protocols are the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and pornography and on the involvement of children in armed conflict. The Lao PDR has also signed the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. The Lao PDR is also a party to other conventions in the field of promotion and protection of human rights such as the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide; the Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery; the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid; the Convention on the Non-Applicability of Statutory Limitation to War Crimes; and Crimes Against Humanity and the Convention on the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others.

62. The Lao PDR is a State Party to other conventions relating to human rights and humanitarian law such as the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the two additional protocols, namely the Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of the Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I) and Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-international Armed Conflicts (Protocol II). In addition, the Lao PDR is also a party to nine conventions under the International Labour Organization (Conventions Nos. 6, 13, 29, 100, 111, 138, 144, 171, and 182). The country is a party to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its three Protocols, the United Nations Convention against Corruption, and., as a war-torn country actively participated and played an important role in the drafting process of Convention on Cluster Munitions, which was ratified by the Lao PDR shortly after the signing.

63. The Lao PDR became a Member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1997 and most recently chaired ASEAN in 2016. The Lao PDR is a party to numerous ASEAN Agreements, including the ASEAN Charter and the Treaty on Amity and Cooperation in South East Asia, and has signed the ASEAN Convention against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.

64. Among the human rights conventions to which the Lao People's Democratic Republic is party, the Lao PDR has not entered reservations and/or declarations except with regard to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Arts. 1, 18 and 22). The Government of the Lao PDR is willing to adhere to universal human rights standards set forth in these conventions and implement them in good faith, bearing in mind the national

context and reality of the Lao PDR. In the implementation of human rights treaties, the Lao PDR has never suspended treaty provisions.

65. The Lao People's Democratic Republic has undergone the Human Rights Council universal periodic review (UPR) twice. Of the total of 196 recommendations made for the Lao PDR during the second cycle in 2015, 116 recommendations were accepted in full, while 80 recommendations did not enjoy the Lao PDR's support as they are inconsistent with the reality in the country or the country is not ready to implement them.

B. The general legal framework within which human rights are protected at the national level

66. The Constitution of the Lao PDR (Chapter IV) clearly provides for the fundamental rights and duties of Lao citizens (Article 34 to article 51). In particular, Lao citizens are equal before the law regardless of their gender, social status, education, beliefs and ethnic group (Article 34); Lao citizens of both genders enjoy equal rights in the political, economic, cultural and social fields and in family affairs (Art. 37). The Constitution of the Lao PDR provides for the rights to vote and stand for election, the right to education, the right to work, the right to health care, the right to recreation, freedom of movement and residence, the right to petition, complaint and expression of opinion to the organs concerned, the right to physical inviolability, dignity and housing, the freedom to believe or not to believe in religion, the right to freedom of speech, press, assembly, association and to stage demonstrations which are not contrary to the laws, the right to freedom of scientific research, application of scientific and technical achievements and technologies, the rights to artistic and literature creativity and to engage in activities which are not contrary to the laws. Aliens and stateless persons are protected by the law of the Lao PDR.

67. The National Assembly has so far adopted more than 120 laws including those directly or indirectly related to human rights promotion and protection such as the Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Children, Law on the Development and Protection of Women, Law on Nationality, Law on Family, Law on Complaints, Penal Law, Law on Criminal Procedure, Law on the People's Courts, Law on People's Prosecutors, Law on the Election of the National Assembly Deputies, Labour Law, Law on Trade Union, Law on Education, Law on Food, Law on Medical Treatment, Law on Hygiene, Disease Prevention and Health Care, Law on Mass Media, Law on the Lao Front for National Construction, Law on Consumer Protection, etc.

68. The implementation of human rights treaties to which the Lao People's Democratic Republic is a party in the Lao PDR involves the transformation of treaty obligations into specific national legislation. Thus the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child have been transformed into the Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Children, the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women have been transformed into the Law on the Development and Protection of Women, while the provisions of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination have been transformed into the Criminal Law. Provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights find reflection in the National Constitution and relevant laws of the Lao PDR. In addition to laws adopted by the National Assembly there are numerous legal instruments issued by the President of the Republic, the Government, Ministries, Ministry-equivalent Organisations and Local Administrations. The sub-laws which directly implement human rights are the Prime Minister's Decree on the Management of Religious Activities and the Prime Minister's Decree on Associations. The Government is in the final stage of drafting a Decree on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to implement the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

69. The national mechanisms that deal with human rights protection include the National Assembly's Department of Petitions and Nationality Affairs, the People's Courts and the Office of the People's Prosecutor. The remedial processes for human rights violations are stipulated in the Law on Complaints, the Law on Criminal Procedure and

other relevant laws. If a person is not happy with the decision by a court concerning his or her case, the person has a right to appeal that extends through the appellate courts to the People's Supreme Court. As a rule, the decision of the People's Supreme Court is final. However, there is still the opportunity for the person not happy with the People's Supreme Court's decision to seek justice from the National Assembly through the Department of Petitions and Nationality Affairs.

70. The People's Court is the adjudicative body of the State and has jurisdiction to try offences against the law, including actions by the executive organs that infringe upon the rights and dignity of the citizens. The Criminal Law specifies offences against the rights and freedoms of citizens (chapter 3), which include duress, unlawful arrest and detention, abduction and trafficking in human beings, violation of individual freedoms of speech, association, trespassing of residence, violation of personal privacy, the obstruction of the right to vote and to stand for election, and forgery or destruction of election documents. The amended Criminal Law (2005) incorporates obligations of the Lao People's Democratic Republic under international human rights treaties. The amendments criminalize acts discriminating against members of ethnic groups and women, and human trafficking. Family and juvenile chambers have been established in the People's Courts for dealing with cases concerning juvenile and family matters.

71. The Office of the People's Prosecutor monitors the proper application of law by the investigation and interrogation authorities and the People's Courts aimed at ensuring justice in the proceedings as well as protecting human rights of the accused. The Office of the People's Prosecutor is also assigned with the responsibility for justice in juvenile cases, including the application of non-custodial measures for children.

72. The Lao Bar Association (LBA) started to play an increasing role in the justice system of the Lao People's Democratic Republic. The LBA provides legal assistance to accused persons in criminal cases, including the provision of free legal aid for the poor. A legal aid clinic has been set up by the LBA to provide free legal services to the poor whose rights are breached.

73. In the Lao People's Democratic Republic legal system, the people's courts do not directly apply treaty provisions in adjudicating cases. The practice in the past however has been that the people's courts apply domestic law, in harmony with the treaty obligations assumed by the country.

74. A number of institutional arrangements have been put in place in the country to deal with the supervision of the implementation of human rights treaties. Inter-agency arrangements have been established which include the National Commission for Mothers and Children, the National Commission for the Advancement of Women, the National Steering Committee on the International Covenants on Human Rights, the National Steering Committee on the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the National Committee on Persons with Disabilities, the National Steering Committee on Anti Human Trafficking and the National Steering Committee on the Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

75. In the Lao People's Democratic Republic the Lao Front for National Construction and mass organizations also play a vital role in human rights protection. The mass organizations include the Lao Women's Union, the Lao Youth Union, the Lao Federation of Trade Unions, and the Lao Federation of War Veterans. The Lao Front for National Construction is the political organization that forges solidarity among all ethnic groups, religions and social strata in the Lao PDR. The Lao Front, among other tasks, is concerned with the protection of human rights of all ethnic groups, and religious freedoms. The Lao Women's Union as a mass organization mobilizes all Lao women to participate in the national development and poverty reduction among women. The Lao Women's Union has the following specific tasks: to meet the development needs of Lao women, to promote the status and role of women, to promote the solidarity among women of all ethnic groups and all strata. The Lao Federation of Trade Unions as a mass organization protects the rights and interests of working people in the Lao PDR, including the rights to work, fair working conditions, trade union rights and social security. The Lao Youth Union as a mass organization has the tasks of protecting the rights and interests of the youth so that they

fully develop their potential to contribute to the national development of the country. The Lao Youth Union is concerned, among other things, with the protection of young people from falling victims of human trafficking and giving appropriate assistance to such victims. The Lao Federation of War Veterans protects the rights and interests of those who sacrificed themselves for the liberation and protection of the country.

C. The general framework within which human rights are promoted at the national level

76. The Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic attaches importance to the promotion of human rights with the understanding that increased awareness of human rights and human dignity among government officials as well as throughout the Lao society contributes to the respect for human rights and reduces violations. The established institutional inter-agency arrangements as mentioned earlier are vested with the task of promoting human rights under their mandate. In addition, each line ministry and institution has established a human rights focal point consisting of 2-5 officials who are responsible for, among other things, the promotion of human rights under the Constitution, laws and international treaties relevant to the work of their ministry/institution. In the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Human Rights Division under the Department of Treaties and Law acts as the focal point on human rights inter-ministerial coordination. With the support of the International Law Project (www.ilp.gov.la), which is initiated by UNDP and funded by the Government of Finland and the EU, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been actively conducting dissemination of the human rights treaties to which the Lao PDR is a party as well the treaties under consideration by the Lao PDR to different target groups, including government officials, National Assembly members, judges, prosecutors, police officers at the central and local levels, lawyers, academics, researchers, students, members of mass and civil society organizations and the public at large. The International Law Project has been so successful that the UNDP Regional Centre based in Bangkok has made a case study of this successful human rights project. All core human rights treaties and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights have been translated into the Lao language. Two volumes (Volume I and Volume II) on human rights treaties have been produced and widely disseminated; numerous seminars and workshops on different human rights themes have been organized throughout the country.

77. Among the major events in awareness-raising of human rights in Lao society was the commemoration of the 50th and 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1998 and 2008 respectively. Particular mention should be made of the 2008 Grand Ceremony co-chaired by the Deputy Prime Minster, Minister of Foreign Affairs and the United Nations Resident Coordinator in the Lao People's Democratic Republic to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration with more than 1,300 attendees.

78. The dissemination of human rights information has been actively carried out also by other organizations such as the Lao Women's Union and the National Commission for the Advancement of Women, the National Commission for Mother and Child, and the National Committee on Persons with Disabilities. The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) has also set up the Information Centre on the rights of the child. The Office of the People's Prosecutors advocates for, among other things, juvenile justice. The Lao Bar Association disseminates information on human rights among members of different ethnic groups. The Lao Disabled People's Association advocates human rights and disability rights. The Human Rights Centre under the National Academy of Social Sciences conducts research on human rights and organizes workshops on different human rights themes. A Human Rights Unit has been set up in the Faculty of Law and Political Science at the National University of Laos with the aim of integrating the teaching of human rights in the Faculty's curriculum. The Ministry of Education has been working on a textbook on human rights education to be used in schools.

79. The media including the State and privately run newspapers, magazines, and TV and radio programmes play an increasing role in human rights promotion through disseminating information on human rights under the Constitution and laws as well as human rights

treaties. Special TV and Radio programmes are run to promote women's rights and the rights of children.

80. The Lao People's Democratic Republic does not have an independent human rights institution as per the Paris principles. However, the existing institutional arrangements and mechanisms have been gradually strengthened and are most suitable for the promotion and protection of human rights at this stage of the country's development and realities. Non-governmental organizations have been established in the form of social and professional organizations. With the adoption of the Prime Minister's Decree on Associations, civil society organizations will be increased in number and will further contribute to national socio-economic development and poverty reduction, and to promoting the human rights of the Lao people of all ethnic groups. At present, about 160 INGOs are active in assisting the Lao PDR in the different fields of national development.

D. The role of the reporting process in the promotion of human rights at the national level

81. In the process of drafting reports under human rights conventions as well as the universal periodic review under the United Nations Human Rights Council, the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic has paid attention to the participation by all stakeholders including relevant government agencies, and mass, social, professional, academic and research organizations. The institutional inter-agency arrangements mentioned elsewhere in this report are all tasked with the supervision of preparation of reports under respective human rights treaties. Taking an active part in the process of drafting reports under human right treaties and the UPR, including this common core document, were representatives of the non-state actors, namely the Lao Front for National Construction, the Lao Women's Union, the Lao Youth Union, the Lao Federation of Trade Unions, the Lao Bar Association, the Lao Disabled People's Association, the Human Rights Centre of the National Academy of Social Sciences, the National University of Laos and other social and professional organizations and foundations. International organizations, and international non-governmental organizations based in the Lao PDR have had the opportunity to comment on draft reports under human rights treaties and the UPR. Notably, experts from the respective treaty bodies have been invited to facilitate in workshops organized to discuss draft reports under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The Lao PDR intends to invite an expert from the Human Rights Committee and the Committee on the Rights of Disabled Persons to be lead resource person for the upcoming workshops to discuss the draft reports under the respective treaties.

82. In the process of drafting reports on human rights, collection of data and information was conducted from the central to the local level. Interviews of concerned groups were conducted. By way of example, in the drafting of the reports under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, first-hand data and information was collected from the people living in different provinces; as for reporting under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the collection of information was conducted from the central to local level including field visits to major development projects that impact on the livelihood of local communities.

83. The national reports under human rights treaties and the UPR, as well as the concluding observations, comments and recommendations of the respective treaty bodies and the Human Rights Council are published in the Lao language, which is the official language in the country, and are widely disseminated in the society. The Government pays great attention to the follow-up on the recommendations of treaty bodies and of the Human Rights Council with regard to the UPR. Consultations, seminars and workshops on follow-up are organized with the active participation of government ministries, and mass and civil society organizations.

84. The participatory approach in the human rights reporting process, the publication of the national reports on human rights, as well as the action taken by the Government in the follow-up on treaty bodies' recommendations and the recommendations under the UPR through workshops, seminars and consultations have effectively contributed to further raising awareness of human rights in the Lao society, contributing to the promotion and protection of human rights in the country.

E. Other information on human rights

85. The Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic has actively cooperated with the international community in different fields related to the promotion and protection of human rights. In particular, the Government attaches importance to the implementation of the World Conferences, including the World Summit for Children (1990), the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (1992), International Conference on Population and Development (1994), the World Summit for Social Development (1995), the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995), the Second United Nations Conference on Habitat (1996), the United Nations Millennium Summit (2000) and the follow-up Summits (2005) and (2010), the United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (2001), the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (2001), the World Business Summit on Climate Change (2009) etc.

86. The Beijing Platform for Action has been integrated into policies and actions in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, which resulted in the establishment of the National Commission for the Advancement of Women. The Government adopted the National Strategy for the Advancement of Women (2006-2010) consisting of five Plans of Action. The period 2009-2010 is the concluding year of the implementation of the National Strategy for the Advancement of Women (2006-2010). The National Commission for the Advancement of Women is reviewing and assessing the outcome of each Plan of Action implementation and will improve the contents of the strategy for promotion of women's advancement to turn them into a new strategy for 2011-2015 in line with the 7th National Socio-Economic Development Plan.

87. The realization of human rights for the Lao people is being achieved through the implementation of the outcome of the Summit on the Millennium Development Goals (2000), particularly the national endeavours to achieve the MDGs. The Lao People's Democratic Republic has already submitted its two reports on the implementation of the MDGs. The second report was on the Mid-Term Review of the progress in achieving the MDGs by the Lao PDR. Since the first report, the Lao PDR has been able to continually maintain the economic growth rates. Economic growth is a main factor for the eradication of poverty. While the Lao PDR has made great progress and there is a high possibility of reaching the target of the MDGs on primary education and the reduction of infant mortality, there are still challenges in the way of achieving other targets set in the MDGs, particularly the elimination of hunger. The implementation of MDGs is interrelated and mutually reinforcing with the implementation of the human rights treaties to which the Lao PDR is a party.

F. Non-discrimination and equality

88. In pursuing a policy of promotion and protection of human rights, the Government attaches great importance to the principles of non-discrimination and equality which are enshrined in the Constitution and laws. Article 35 of the Constitution provides that "all Lao citizens, irrespective of gender, social status, level of education, religious beliefs and ethnicity are equal before the law". Article 34 of the Constitution provides that "any person holding Lao nationality is considered a Lao citizen as defined in law". Lao nationality is acquired at birth, by grant and on other grounds as defined in Articles 11 to 14 of the Law on Lao Nationality. Persons other than Lao citizens in the Lao PDR also have protection of rights and obligations on the basis of the Constitution and the laws of the Lao PDR. In particular, Article 50 of the Constitution states that "aliens and stateless persons also have the rights to protection of their rights and freedoms as defined in the laws of the Lao PDR,

to lodge their complaints to the courts and agencies concerned of the Lao PDR, and have obligations to respect the Lao PDR constitution and laws".

89. Article 6 of the Law on People's Courts, guarantees equality of all before the law: "all Lao citizens are equal before the Law and Courts regardless of origin, social and economic status, race, ethnicity, language, sex, education, occupation, religion, residence and others". Article 6 of the Law on the Criminal Procedure provides that "... the judgment on a criminal case shall be made on the basis of equality of all Lao citizens before the Law and Courts regardless of their origin, social and economic status, race, ethnicity, language, sex, religion, education, occupation, residence and others. The People's Courts shall create conditions for people, particularly the defendants, offenders and accused in civil cases to exercise their rights in order to secure the correct and objective proceedings"; The Law on Civil Procedure provides in Article 3 that "only the court has the jurisdiction over a civil case and the judgment shall be made on the basis of Lao citizens' equality"; Article 6 of the same law provides for all citizens' equality before the law and court: "the civil proceedings shall be carried out on the ground of equality of all citizens before the law and court without any discrimination as to sex, race, ethnicity, social and economic status, language, education, occupation, belief, residence and others. The people's court shall create conditions for citizens, in particular for litigants, to exercise their rights to equality in order to secure that the proceedings be carried out duly and objectively".

90. Gender equality and non-discrimination are detailed in the Law on the Development and Protection of Women. Article 13 of the Law states that "Gender equality is parity in self-development; women and men have the same value and opportunities in the political economic, socio-cultural fields and in the family, defence and security matters and foreign affairs as provided in the Constitution and laws".

91. Equality and non-discrimination among ethnic groups are guaranteed in the Constitution and laws. All the 49 ethnic groups are equal before the law. The Constitution of the Lao PDR provides in Article 8 that: "the State pursues a policy of solidarity and equality among the ethnic groups. All ethnic groups have the right to maintain and develop their fine customs, traditions and culture of the country and their own communities. The acts of divisions and discriminations between ethnic groups are prohibited". The Criminal Law contains provisions criminalizing the offence of discrimination against ethnic groups and the offence of division of solidarity among ethnic groups (Articles 66 and 176).

92. The Government pays particular attention to guaranteeing equality and non-discrimination against people with disabilities, many of whom are victims of unexploded ordnance (UXO), cluster munitions and other war remnants. The Government encourages favourable conditions to be created for people with disabilities to exercise their rights on a basis of equality with others in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the nation. Disabled people receive support from the State and society in tackling issues facing them like healthcare, rehabilitation, occupations and the exercise of their other rights in accordance with the law. A sub-law on the rights of people with disabilities is in the process of making in the form of a Prime Minister's Decree, which, once adopted, will be a legal basis which sets forth detailed rules and procedures to effectively ensure the disability rights in the Lao People's Democratic Republic.